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Mohandas Gandhi's Dogmatic Ahimsa and Adharmic Experiments with Truth: An Analysis

A psychological analysis of Gandhi's experiments in celibacy and

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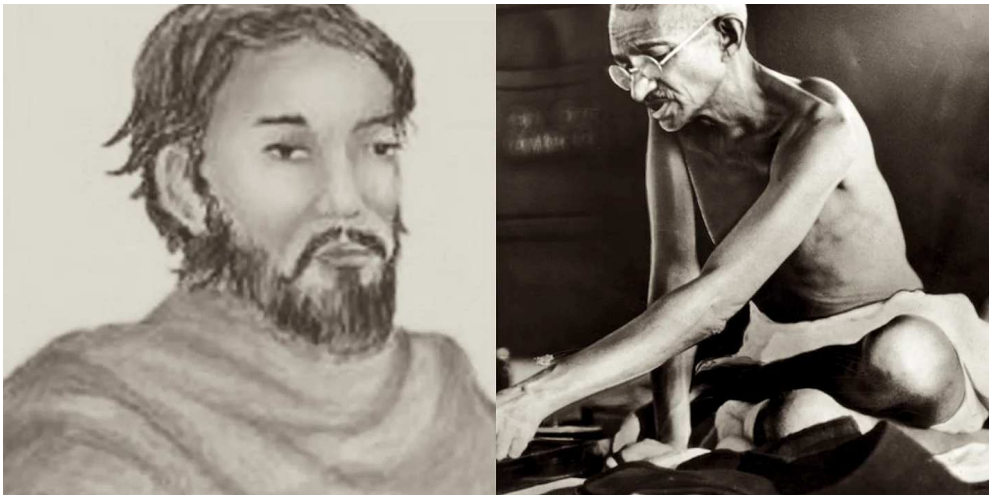

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Samhata|bahuvidha/sattvo

Niksepa|dravina|vari|bahu|trsnah

Satatam ahimsa|dambho

Vadav”|agnih sarva|bhakso ʻyam.

The sanctimoniousness of non-violence is a ceaseless,

All devouring submarine fire

Which has destroyed all manner of *creatures : treasures,*

Which thirsts for water in the form of deposited wealth. (1.61)

Janah|hrdaya|vipralambo

Maya|sthambho jajag/jay/arambhah

Jayati sad”|anupalambho

Nirgata|Dambhodayo dambhah.

Sanctimoniousness is triumphant,

Dismaying people’s hearts,

A paralysis induced by delusion overwhelming the world

A pillar of deceit

Erected to commemorate world-domination,

A perpetual unawareness,

An incarnation of Dambhodbhava (1.45)

Kshemendra: The Grace of Guile. 1. Sanctimoniousness

Introduction

Piercing through the armor of sanctimoniousness is an almost impossible task,

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and even for Gods it is a challenging task. It has mass appeal, as it allows self-certification for being and doing good, and bestows societal recognition for upholding sanctity. It has an *Asuric* strength to delude people into overlooking this illusion. It has the power to present hypocrisy as piety. The *Asura* named *Dambhodbhava*, after a rigorous penance received a boon from Surya Deva and received the *Sahasra Kavacha* – thousand layers of protective armour, which only *Nara* and *Narayana* together were able to pierce through 999 layers. It is said in the Mahabharata that the *Asura* with the remaining single cover was reborn as Karna, who willingly donated the existing layer to Indra and eventually faced death in the hands of *Nara* (Arjunaa) and Narayana (Krishna). The *Asura* had a very powerful ammunition to dominate and fool people into submission. This weapon was sanctimoniousness.

I began this essay with the wise words of the great satirist from Kashmir – *Kshemendra*, followed by a summary of a tale from the Mahabharata, not only to reflect on a few actions of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, but also to problematize absolute ideals. One such ideal is 'dogmatic *Ahimsa*' where the key word is **dogmatic.**

Analysing Gandhi

The worst sorts of atrocities in human history have been waged in the guise of 'doing good,' and to supposedly uphold universal principles of justice and morality. This overzealous effort in building mass movements to secure freedom and justice, if left unchecked and unquestioned, based on ground realities, quickly morphs into tyranny and sanctimoniousness. When an ideal reaches its feverish pitch and loses contact with reality, leaders and their followers become prisoners of their own liberation philosophy. When that happens, we need the stinging satire of *Kshemendra.* Secondly, shouldn't our methods in experimenting with truth follow strict ethical guidelines, particularly when it is certainly going to cause irreparable damage to youngsters? It is one thing to impose rigorous practices on oneself, but to recruit impressionable underage girls to carry out perverse experiments is indefensible.

At the very outset, I want to make clear what my intentions are: they are not an

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attempt at a wholesale vilification of an iconic figure; instead, it is to caution against wholesale embrace and deification of an iconic figure. In this essay, I shall concentrate primarily on two major areas of Gandhi's life:

1. His response to the Moplah massacre of Hindus

2. His vulgar practices to verify for himself if he has been able to adhere to his vow of celibacy.

Jayadratha's Yudhishtiran Forgiveness Leads to Mohandas Gandhi's Blackmail of the Nehruvian Government

There are no peace movements in any part of the world that do not invoke the name of Gandhi. He is placed on a pedestal with Buddha, overlooking the fact that Buddha traversed through his inner landscape that led to Self-Realization, whereas exteriority characterized all actions of Gandhi, including his experiments in celibacy, which only led to self-affirmation and even glorification. Accompanying this elevation is another myth that India's freedom struggle was non-violent. Was it? Perhaps the colonizer managed to leave without much bleeding, but the colonized were drenched in blood.

Aurobindo's Caution

It is precisely for this reason that Sri Aurobindo cautioned against Gandhi's brand of *Ahimsa* because it is built on surface level ideals, imposed through the force of guilt. Sri Aurobindo points out that such a Satyagraha leads neither towards purification nor transformation. In many ways, mass movements are built on the

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frenzy that superficial ideals create. It is very easy to jump onto the bandwagon of movements and protests and shout slogans in a shrill voice, but it takes a lot of patience and maturity to cede your territory to accommodate and hear the divergent voices to find durable solutions for a problem. Rabindranath Tagore brilliantly communicated this point in his fictional masterpiece *Ghare Bhaire* – The Home and the World. In this work, Tagore draws a sharp contrast between Sandip, a charismatic leader of the freedom movement who not only manages to seduce crowds into his mission, but also the young and impressionable wife of his friend Nikhil. Unlike Sandip, who is deceptive and self-centered, Nikhil brings about actual revolution silently and shows no appetite for Sandip's rhetoric. Muted noble deeds don't necessarily find any place in mass movements.

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Sri Aurobindo was active in the freedom struggle long before Gandhi even landed in India from South Africa. What started as freedom for a nation evolved into recovering and reclaiming a great civilization for Sri Aurobindo. Gandhi was simply incapable of doing what Sri Aurobindo did and Aurobindo would not do what Gandhi did. Their methods and their philosophy were worlds apart. Sri Aurobindo insisted on interior truth and internal freedom – a hallmark of Integral Yoga – that he advocated. There was nothing integral or impartial about Gandhi's militant non-violence. It was always titled towards one side.

Consider the absurdity and hypocrisy of Gandhi's reaction to the Moplah

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massacre that occurred exactly a hundred years ago:

> **Even if one side is firm in doing its dharma, there will be no enmity between the two. He alone may be said to be firm in his dharma who trusts his safety to God and, untroubled by anxiety, follows the path of virtue. If Hindus apply this rule to the Moplah affair, they will not, even if they see the error of the Moplahs, accuse the Muslims.**
>
> ***Mohandas Gandhi***

Forced truce only builds resentment and it continues to feed the beast and lasting peace is never achieved. Gandhi was not even subtle or suggestive and it was not about truth and reconciliation, instead it was a call for one side to surrender to the Moplah genocide:

> **Hindus should not harbor anger in their hearts against Muslims even if the latter wanted to destroy them. Even if the Muslims want to kill us all we should face death bravely. If they established their rule after killing Hindus, we would be ushering in a new world by sacrificing our lives. None should fear death. Birth and death are inevitable for every human being.**
>
> ***Mohandas Gandhi***

These words are a clear call for self-annihilation.

The Message of Sri Krishna

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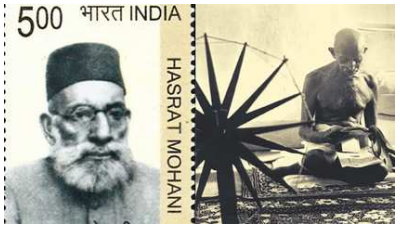
There is a reason Bhagwan Krishna did not permit Arjuna to remain in his state of despondency when Arjuna took shelter in superficial ideals, saying that he will not fight with his kith and kin and would rather give up his demand for his share of kingdom. Sri Krishna's first response was *Kutas tva kasmalam idam* – where did this stain on the spirit come from? he asks Arjuna as it brings *Akirti* – disgrace. Krishna disapproves of oversimplified and seeming words of wisdom saying, *Prajnavadams ca bhasase*, because those words come from weakness and not strength. In the first chapter in *Bhagawad Gita* we hear in Arjuna's voice, dogmatic *Ahimsa* in a state of despair.



Mohandas Gandhi Orders the Indian National Congress to Succumb to Moplah Jihadis in the Infamous Resolution No. 3

To build a narrative around events of the past and about an iconic figure, it must first and foremost be selective in its focus, and carefully couch it in idealistic language (like non-violence, seeker of Truth, etc.), so that it goes uncontested. Furthermore, the narrative often is dissociated from actual events or given a twist (Moplah massacre described as a peasant revolt), and false equivalencies are drawn holding both the oppressor and the oppressed equally responsible. That's why Kshemendra rightly said in *The Grace of Guile*, "For villains, sanctimoniousness is a secret magic spell, with a fulfilling gem for all they crave," (1.42) and in another quatrain he says, "Through the penance of observing vows arises the smugness of the heron," (1.49) and in the following stanza he says, 'Heron-smugness is a chieftain among false pieties," (1.50).

This great satirist from Kashmir says it all and it resonates so well with current debates on how the most intolerant people cry about intolerance in society and most illiberal people stand under the banner of liberalism. Dogmas come in many forms and the ones framed in phantom ideals are the most difficult to even recognize, let alone resist and retaliate.

Gandhi Escapes Reproach

In a recent discussion on Gandhi, Sushil Pandit made an interesting observation that *Gandhi's assassination gave him an escape route from any kind of reproach*. The narrative on Gandhi became an extended encomium – a civic funeral speech that knew no bounds in deifying his character. Autobiographical and biographical accounts on Gandhi laid bare his actions and the genre of encomium could only accommodate glorification and this genre spread across the globe, contributing to building a saintly image of Gandhi. In the history of the novel, this genre is meant for the public square and the tone must be panegyric. Furthermore, nothing is personal, private, or secretive about the life of a public figure in this genre. Like the public disrobing of Draupadi in the court of Hastinapura, Gandhi's experiments in celibacy were no secret and despite vehement disapproval from leaders like Sardar Patel and C. Rajagopalachari, Gandhi continued to carry out his perverse practices.

The Misguided Mystic's Misadventures: R.C. Majumdar's Assessment of Mohandas Gandhi's Ideals and Methods

Gandhi's embrace of *Brahmacharya* that included abstinence from sexual relationships began when he was in his late 30's and they were part of his experiments with truth, and they did not stop with abstinence. He wanted to verify if he was able to control his temptation in a real-life situation: being unclothed with naked women in his presence. Furthermore, it was not a one-time experiment. Instead, it became a routine practice which he shockingly carried out with his underage grandniece. Undoubtedly, Gandhi wanted to demonstrate to the world that he had gained mastery over his senses, temptations, and shortcomings of the mind. With unabashed pride, Gandhi disclosed the details of his experiments to his associates on numerous occasions and had no desire to keep it a secret. On the contrary, he wanted to announce to the world with a megaphone,

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rationalizing his actions.

The real question is this: do Gandhi's indefensible and unethical experiments, using young women, contribute to our knowledge about the effective practices to manage the urges of the body?

An Old Tale

At this juncture, I would like to introduce a summary of a short story entitled *An Old Tale* by the eminent Kannada writer, Masti Venkatesha Iyengar. A Sanyasi and his devoted Brahmachari disciple were studying a text and one of the epigrams statef, "a woman's beauty is sure to attract every man, be he old, wise or a Sanyasi." When the Guru heard these words, he was perturbed and instructed his disciple to erase the words and said emphatically that a Sanyasi, particularly one like him, could never succumb to such temptations. The disciple, who believed in the possibility of even a mendicant caving in, hesitated and pointed out that those words came from none other than *Vyasa*. But the Guru was firm, and the disciple erased the words dutifully, though unconvinced.

Introducing the Jivana of Masti Venkatesha Iyengar

As dusk fell, the Sanyasi and his disciple heard the sound of anklets and a knock on the door. A shivering woman in wet clothes stood at the door and said she lost her way in the forest and got separated from her husband and needed shelter that night. She enquired if there were women in the ashram, so that her safety could be guaranteed. The Sanyasi assured her that she would be safe, as they were mendicants. He then brought a lantern to guide the woman to her room and noticed that the woman looked extraordinarily, almost ethereally beautiful. In her wet clothes, the contours of her body were visible. Once the woman entered her room and bolted the door, the Sanyasi's curiosity grew. He knocked at her door

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repeatedly throughout the night. He convinced himself that his motives were pure and that he only wanted to see her beautiful face. He wanted to know the identity of this woman who cast a magic spell on him. As dawn approached, the Sanyasi could no longer contain his curiosity and broke open the door. There was no woman in the room. Instead, he saw Vyasa himself and realized his folly. He was able to erase the words, but not the truth that the words represented. The Sanyasi also came to know that the woman was none other than Goddess Sharada. He asked his disciple, who readily admitted that he knew from the very beginning that the woman was none other than the Goddess. The disciple who acknowledged the veracity of the epigram recognized the goddess, while the Guru who erased the words was only able to see a woman he was attracted to.

The lesson from this *Old Tale* is that many great Rishis in our Puranas despite rigorous penance, succumbed at least temporarily to the power of Kama or sexual desire. This is why Indra weaponized this weakness and frequently dispatched his *Apsaras* to do the job, and he even sent Kama Deva to disrupt Shiva's penance. Denying or trying to control the truth, only takes you far away from truth.

Was Gandhi a Sanyasi?

Did Gandhi, like the Sanyasi in the tale, think that he was above and beyond these human foibles? The Sanyasi realizes his misjudgment, but there are no records of Gandhi realizing his grave blunder. Or did he conduct his experiments because he was doubtful about his resolve in thought, speech and action? If he really wanted to verify the workings of his inner self, there was no need to engage in these bizarre and unethical practices. Once he recognized that the imaginary lover had vacated his inner self, then the desire disappeared as well. Why place these young women in such disgusting situations? If Gandhi's defense was that he did not engage in actual sexual relations, it is still not justifiable. That would be like Bill Clinton's defense.

While mere sexual innuendos cause considerable damage, what Gandhi did was way beyond that. It seems that Gandhi was not so preoccupied with the interior truth at all; it was the exteriority, the loud announcement to the world that he

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managed to triumph over the pull of *Kama* – (lust) that mattered to him. Making the argument that these women did not protest has no merit whatsoever, because victims of childhood sexual molestation recognize and respond to the horror much later in life or they find expression in different forms. On the other hand, if Gandhi was struggling with his out-of-control libido, he could have become a womanizer and that would not have been so hypocritical.

Were Gandhi's methods inadequate or flawed? Was he being more Catholic than *Sanatani*? Perhaps, had he adopted the method of channeling emotions rather than controlling them as the mystics, thinkers and poets of *Sanatana Dharma* did, the attempt could have been more fruitful. More importantly, truth on many levels would not have been compromised and there would have been no touch of *Adharma*.

How Mohandas Gandhi's Pious Dictatorship Culminated in the Genocide of Hindus in Malabar: The Hidden Details

Any ideal, even something like *Ahimsa* when it loses contact with actual time and space turns dogmatic. Even Sri Krishna goes as a peace-messenger first and when his message does not get a fair hearing, war becomes the only option.

Gandhi even believed that if the force of non-violence was strong enough, the hearts of the Nazis would have melted. When such absurdities prevail, as *Kshemendra* said long ago, sanctimoniousness begins to overwhelm and dominate the world, leaving people in a state of delusion.

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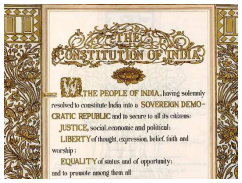
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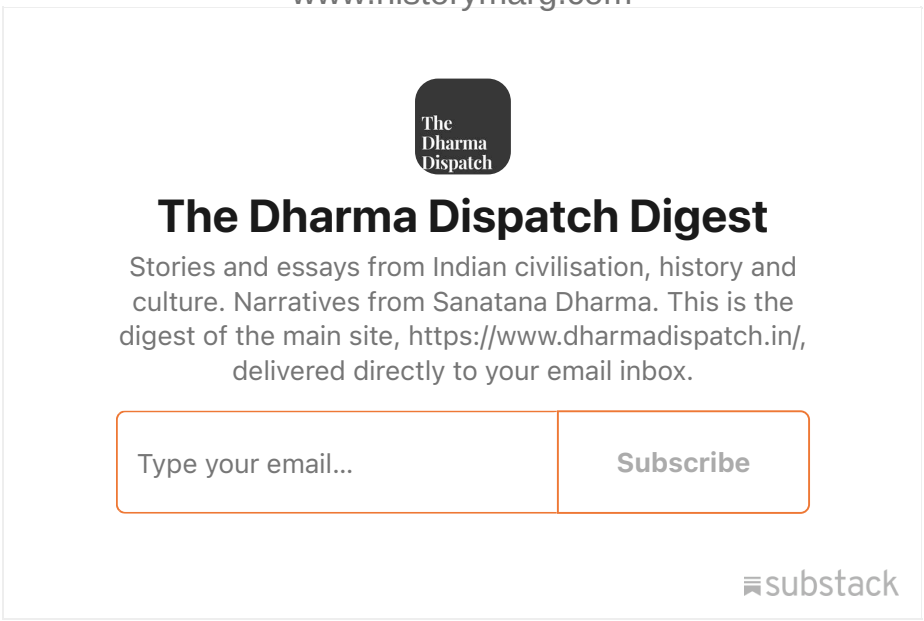
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